NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, *238 William St., N. Y.*

No. 375. *Price, Five Cents.*

THE DEVIL WORSHIPERS

OR THE DEFIANCE OF DAZAAR

CHRISTINGER,
COVINGTON, KY.
New Books
Just Published.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

The gigantic Thibetans sprang into the hallway from the parlor door. Nick Carter was prepared for the attack, and dealt the first one a terrific blow with the butt of his weapon.

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THE DEVIL WORSHIPERS;

OR,

The Defiance of Dazaar.

C. RISINGER
94 Pike St. COVINGTON
Old and New Books
Bought, Sold & Exchanged.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLACE OF THE SECRET MEETING.

Nick Carter's Japanese assistant, Ten-Ichi, came to an abrupt stop at the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fifth Street and fixed his eyes intently upon some chalk marks that had been made on the pavement.

In appearance these marks suggested nothing more than that boys had been engaged in decorating the sidewalk after their own ideas of advanced art, and nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand persons in passing would have devoted no more than a glance upon the hieroglyphics; but to Ten-Ichi, reared in Japan, and all his life a student of oriental mysteries, these marks were filled with significance.

The drawing—if the chalk marks may be so dignified—portrayed the outlines of an individual who might have represented an American Indian, a figure of Neptune, or a fair representation of the devil himself—and, indeed, as Ten-Ichi instantly assumed, the last of the three had furnished the artist's model.

The picture represented the head and shoulders and one arm of the figure. The hand held a three-pronged spear, poised in the air ready to hurl, and, if it had been projected in the direction indicated, it would have flown through Thirty-fifth Street toward the East River.

Although the young assistant halted abruptly the instant he discovered the chalk marks on the pavement, the time that elapsed while he hesitated might have been counted within the space of one second. In fact, one glance was sufficient to convince him that his first

astonished impression of the meaning of the sign was correct, and then he immediately withdrew from its proximity and crossed the street to the southeast corner, where, with every observant sense keenly alert, he waited for developments.

"It is the mark of the Devil Worshipers," he thought, rapidly, "and it is freshly made. Unless I am greatly mistaken it won't be long before one of the clique will be looking for it. If they do those things here the same way they do them in Japan, I won't have much difficulty in presenting myself at their meeting, and, moreover, of being accepted as a regular member of their cult."

After a few moments of silent watching, during which nothing occurred that was worthy of his attention or notice, a fashionably attired man of middle age came up Fifth Avenue from the direction of the Waldorf.

He was walking slowly and with his eyes fixed on the pavement in front of him, exactly as if he had dropped something and had turned back to find it.

Ten-Ichi smiled broadly when he saw the man approaching.

"If they are all like that chap," he thought, "I won't find much difficulty in making myself solid with the outfit when I present myself at their meeting. He must be newly initiated, for he is as nervous as a young girl just out of a convent."

It was indeed true.

The man was pallid and manifestly ill at ease.

The long, slender fingers of his delicately white hand twitched ceaselessly as he walked; nor did he once raise his eyes to discover if he were observed.

Instead, it was quite evident that he was wholly absorbed in the search he had undertaken, and Ten-Ichi, who watched him narrowly as he drew nearer the corner where the chalk mark decorated the walk, foresaw precisely what the man would do when he discovered it.

He stopped as suddenly as if he had been shot, straightened up and turned his back upon the telltale mark.

Then, still standing where he had stopped, he swept his gaze up and down the avenue and through Thirty-fifth Street in either direction, palpably for the purpose of discovering if he were followed or watched.

For some reason his gaze swept over Ten-Ichi without observing him; doubtless because the Jap, at that instant, had turned his back, and was studying the architecture of the buildings along the avenue.

Evidently satisfied that he was not observed, the man turned again to the hieroglyphic and for half a moment bent over it, as if he could not believe the evidence of his own senses; and then, as if satisfied, he crossed the avenue toward Ten-Ichi and continued on through Thirty-fifth Street in the direction indicated by the three-pronged spear that was poised in the pictured devil's hand.

"I won't wait for any more of them now," mused Ten-Ichi, "for I can easily see all of them at the meeting, which is sure not to take place for at least twenty-four hours, and this fellow is an easy one to follow. An old bird at the game would be on the lookout, and might give me a little difficulty. Now let me see if I can foretell what the other marks he will discover will be:

"He will walk east till he discovers a second mark, which will be a quarter of a circle to direct him which way to turn. The third mark will be another spear, and that will have one, two or three points to it, indicating whether the meeting is to be to-morrow, the next day, or the day after that, and my man will turn in the direction directly opposite to the way the spear points. The fourth mark will be the figure 12, with a smaller number added to, or subtracted from it, and

that will indicate the hour, after or before midnight, of the meeting, and it will be directly in front of the place where the meeting is to be held."

The result proved that Ten-Ichi's expectations were correct, for with the unimportant difference that the third, fourth and fifth marks were the same, and it was not until the sixth one was encountered that the second pronged spear was encountered, the result was the same, and, ultimately, the man whom the lad followed arrived at a point in front of a house on First Avenue not far from Twenty-third Street, where the chalk marks upon the pavement were these:

12
2
—
14

There had been two prongs to the last spear they encountered, which indicated that the meeting of the that the hour was to be two hours past midnight, or, the second day succeeding that one, while the figures informed the initiated observer that the place of meeting was the house before which they appeared, and that the hour was to be two hours past midinght, or, in other words, at two o'clock in the morning.

Having satisfied himself on this point, the young detective turned back again and retraced his steps over the same route he had come, keenly observant to discover others who, like the man he had followed, were intent upon discovering where the meeting, prohibited by the law of the land, was to be held.

He was not disappointed in this expectation, for he passed two persons who, with their eyes fixed intently upon the pavement in front of them, told him as plainly as they could have done in words, what they were searching for.

The second of these two interested him, for it was a woman, young, expensively gowned, patrician in appearance, and particularly attractive.

For a moment he turned back, thinking that it would be well to follow her, to observe her closely when she should discover the object of her search, and, afterward, to know her address and her name.

But a second thought convinced him that this was unnecessary inasmuch as he was resolved to attend the meeting, and he would surely see her there.

He did, however, study her face keenly, so that there could be no doubt that he would recognize her when he should see her again, and more than ever was he impressed by the exquisite beauty of her face, and the evidence of refinement and high character that was borne upon it.

"You are not the kind that mixes with that sort of a crowd, my lady," mused Ten-Ichi, as he turned toward home, "and, unless I am very greatly mistaken, you have been drawn into this business greatly against your will. Saturday night—or Sunday morning rather—when I see you at the meeting, I'll take especial pains to find out who you are."

Arrived at Nick Carter's house, he went straight to the great detective's study to report what he had discovered, and he found his chief absorbed in the study of the wonderful metalic salt which had so mystified the entire medical fraternity of New York, and even himself, as described in the foregoing number of this series.

Nick Carter was deep in the study of everything he could find that had been written on the subject of radium, and, assisted by the only man in the world who had at that time written a book on the subject—the same man who had assisted him in unraveling the mysteries that surrounded the deaths of those who had expired under the sign of the dagger, he had passed two entire days in making himself as thoroughly acquainted with the great subject as science could demonstrate it.

He was in the act of pushing the books aside when Ten-Ichi entered the room, and he closed them and

went over to the chair near the window as soon as he saw that the young assistant had something of importance to communicate.

"Radium is a wonderful substance, Ten-Ichi," he said, as he seated himself. "I see that you have something to tell me, but before you begin, I want to tell you something about radium, because as long as Dazaar remains alive, we are all likely to become victims of it unless we exercise extraordinary care and caution."

"Dazaar has been keeping mighty still for the last few days," ventured Ten-Ichi.

"True, my boy, but there is always a calm before a great storm. Since the death of that fellow whom we supposed at first to be Dazaar himself, there has been no sign of him, but I am convinced that he is only biding his time for a greater and more villainous stroke than any he has delivered yet."

"I also think that is the case, sir."

"We have the woman, Madam Aira, where she will not easily give us the slip, although I am of the opinion that she has no wish to do so. Irma Plavatski is again in the hospital, violently ill, I am told, but she is closely watched, and I am keeping away from her at the request of the inspector; however, I shall go to see her and talk with her the day after to-morrow. But now about this radium."

"Yes, sir."

Dazaar was a certain oriental criminal, marvelously clever, whom Nick Carter had been pursuing for the past month.

CHAPTER II.

TEN-ICHI'S PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

"I have already cautioned you and Patsy sufficiently about the necessity of examining your hats and the pockets of your clothing, so now, in a few words, let me tell you some of the things that radium will do; after that, I will listen to your story, for I see that it is not urgent."

"No, sir, it is not."

"Then listen: Radium will melt its own weight in ice, every hour for a million years, and diminish nothing of its own weight, heat, or power while it is exerting them; it is always three degrees warmer than the atmosphere surrounding it—that is, than the temperature of anything near it; it gives out a powerful light which will print a photograph in otherwise impenetrable darkness, and this is the quality that led to its discovery; a particle of it, too weak in power to inflict immediate consequences upon you, will, if carried in the pocket, still burn its way into the flesh so that, although the evidence may not be discovered for two weeks, after that an ulcer will form which may be tardy of healing, or may not heal at all, and a particle of it, also weak, worn in the hat, like those in the cases of the deaths we know about, if less strong, will drive the wearer insane, and, ultimately, paralyze the brain and kill; properly applied, it will restore sight to the blind, and will perform wonderful cures as in the case of cancers. Pure radium cannot be produced save with very grave danger, but even in its weakest proportions, it is a dangerous agent to handle. There, that will do for a scientific discourse. Now tell me what you have on your mind."

"Have you ever heard of Devil Worshipers?" asked Ten-Ichi.

"Oh, yes. We hear of them spasmodically—about once in every two or three years, but they do not as a rule take to this country, I think."

"No. Their home is really in the East."

"Yes; and also in Paris and London."

"But now, sir, also in New York."

"Have you discovered a nest of them?"

"Just that."

"Good. Where is it?"

"In First Avenue, not far from Twenty-third Street."

"Well, what of it? What do you expect to find there?"

"Dazaar."

"By Jove, boy, I wouldn't wonder if that might be true!"

"I feel certain of it."

"He certainly is just the one to start such a cult here—or to superintend the starting of one. I begin to think that he does very little himself. He picks out the dirty work, gets it all ready, and then directs another to do it."

"That may be true, sir, but I cannot rid myself of the idea that he will be at the meeting of the Devil Worshipers."

"What makes you so positive?"

"Several things, sir."

"What are they?"

"One is that I have been watching for their signs ever since I have been in this city, and to-day is the first time I have discovered one. They never hold meetings without those signs; their signs are always to be found in the aristocratic sections of a city, and until to-day I have never seen an evidence of one, so I think I am correct in supposing that this clique—that is the name by which the meetings are known—has just been organized, and that this will be their first real gathering."

"Undoubtedly."

"Furthermore, the two novitiates whom I saw are each about to undergo their first experience in devil worship. I could readily assume that much from their manner."

"Well?"

"If this is the first meeting, and if the clique has just been organized, nothing could be more likely than that Dazaar is at the back of it, for I know him to be a——"

Ten-Ichi paused suddenly, whereat Nick Carter smiled broadly.

"Go ahead, lad," he said, kindly. "I know that you are familiar with some of the things connected with Dazaar before he showed up here, and I know that in your own good time you will tell me all you know. There is no hurry, however. Take your own time."

"No, sir, I know as little about Dazaar as you do, with the possible exception that I do know that he has worked the same way he works here, in my own country. I know of his methods and works, but I know next to nothing of him, save that he is supposed to be a Thibetan Lama, and that, notwithstanding his apparent youth—for he appears to be a man of thirty-five, he is believed in my country to have lived many centuries."

"Your country may believe that, Ten-Ichi, but we do not quite swallow it, over here."

"I said that it was believed in my country, not that my country believed it; and you will discover that many things are believed in, in my country, which the men of this side of the world would scoff at; and, also, sir, that your western wise men often scoff at things that are true."

"You've got me there, lad," laughed Nick. "Now go ahead about Dazaar."

"I know him to be a Devil Worshiper, is what I intended to say."

"So you feel assured that he is behind this meeting of the clique."

"Exactly."

"And I am very much inclined to think you are right."

"I am sure of it."

"When is this meeting to be held?"

"Thursday night, or rather, Friday morning, at two o'clock."

"Of course you followed one of the two members you saw, so that we can frighten him or her to give us the passwords and the signs, so that we can attend the meeting?"

"They could not be frightened into giving the passwords, for they are more afraid of the source of their information, than of any threats you might impose. But that was not necessary."

"No? Why not?"

"Because I have already been initiated, and I know them."

"In this country?"

"No; but anywhere in the world, in any language in the world, it is the same."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Positive."

"Then you can instruct me, and we can both go."

"That would be dangerous, sir."

"Well, we don't care much for that, do we? But why?"

"Because while there may be one absentee from the meeting, it is extremely unlikely that there will be any; there certainly will not be two absent without inquiry."

"Well?"

"Those present are first counted. If there is one in excess of the number expected, that one is rigidly examined. If there should be more than one over the expected number, all save the one who gives the best account of himself, are excluded, even if they are found satisfactory, so if we both attended and gave satisfactory proof of our right to be there, we would not both be permitted to remain."

"I see."

"I could instruct you so perfectly that you would doubtless pass the examination; and yet there would be a chance that you might be discovered."

"While you, having been initiated, are the real thing, eh?"

"Yes."

"And you wish me to assign you to attend that meeting?"

"I do."

"Very well, you may go; but I shall not be far away."

"Thank you. That is as I desire it."

"Now what is your plan, for I see that you have one?"

"This: If I am correct in supposing that this is the first meeting of the clique I have discovered, there will be very little done save to organize, and to take steps to secure the required membership, for each clique must consist of at least thirteen members before it becomes officially established. If the membership is not filled, I can present a name for you which we will agree upon, at that meeting, and at the succeeding one you can take the initiation."

"Good," said Nick.

"But I warn you, sir, that it is not a pleasant initiation, for in it you must forswear every thought and principle that is now sacred to you. I did it because I was ordered to do so by my father, whose name you will some day know; he is a gentleman of considerable influence in Japan. You may do it on the principle that to do a great right it is sometimes necessary to do a little wrong."

The detective nodded his head.

"To carry out that plan it will be necessary for you to establish an identity for the purpose, or by borrowing the identity of another person for the purpose. We can arrange for that between now and Thursday night, if you think well of it."

"Are you confident that you can pass muster at the meeting of this clique, Thursday night, Ten-Ichi?"

"Perfectly confident, sir. I will be as safe from harm there as I am here."

"Not if they should discover that you are a fraud."

"But I am not a fraud, and I will not be a fraud. I am as much a member of the organization as any person who will be there."

"But suppose, later, they should find out your purpose in allying yourself with them?"

"They would find a way to kill me without delay, and without mercy."

"And they would doubtless know how to find you, too, eh?"

"They never have known how to find me, even in my own country, where I joined them—and they will not know it now. If, as I suppose, it is Dazaar who is concerned in this clique, doubtless the same man whom I have known in Japan, will officiate. But, sir, let me tell you of the meeting after it takes place. I will then have much more to tell."

"So be it, Ten-Ichi. You are developing wonderfully fast in this business, and the time is not far distant when I shall ask you to tell me more about yourself."

CHAPTER III.

THE ESCAPE OF IRMA PLAVATSKI.

The buzzer which communicated with the push button at the front door at that moment hissed its announcement that some person desired admittance, and, presently, a letter from police headquarters was placed in the detective's hands.

It was a short note from the inspector, and it stated that Irma Plavatski had escaped from the hospital and was gone, nobody knew whither.

The method of her escape had been extremely simple, and for that very reason had worked most admirably.

A carriage had driven to the door, and from it two men had descended and entered the hospital. To the superintendent in charge they had exhibited perfect counterfeits of detective shields, and had stated that they had come to take Mlle. Plavatski to headquarters to be questioned by the inspector, provided she was able to ride there in the carriage; if she were not well enough to do so, of course the inspector would be compelled to come where she was, as the examination could not be delayed.

Considerably to the surprise of the doctors, the young woman had seemed perfectly able and willing to go, and had, therefore, been permitted to do so. Later a telephone message had been received at the hospital which announced that the woman was well enough to be detained at headquarters, and that, therefore, she would not be returned to the hospital unless she became worse again, and in that way twenty-four hours had elapsed since she was taken away before it was discovered that she had not been near the central office, and that the detectives who had called for her were impostors.

"I'll tell you one thing, Ten-Ichi," said the detective, after he had sent the messenger away, "when I get Mlle. Irma in my hands again, I'll keep her where she won't get away till I am ready to let her go. But, just now, I am rather glad she is at liberty, for I have a little suspicion of my own concerning that young woman."

"Is it for me to know?"

"Not yet, my lad. Later. All the same, I wouldn't wonder if we heard something from our esteemed friend, Dazaar, before very long."

The detective was right, as he usually was, for they were destined to hear from that mysterious person within the hour.

Ten-Ichi had gone to his room and Nick was again poring over his works on radium, when Patsy made his appearance.

"There's a woman downstairs who wants to see you,

sir," he said. "I found her wandering up and down the street outside, looking at the houses, and, thinking I could help her, asked her who she wanted to find. She said she was looking for a great detective who lived in this neighborhood, and she believed his name was Carter, although she was not sure;" and Patsy grinned.

"You young rascal!" said Nick. "What did you do then?"

"Why, I brought her here, of course. She's down in the reception room now."

"Who is she, Pat, and what does she want?"

"You can search me. I asked her what her business was, and she said her business was with Mr. Carter. When I got her inside I asked her what name I should give you, and she told me to give you any one I chose, that one would do as well as another, and that is every blessed word she'd say."

"All right. Go back and tell her I'll be down in a moment, and, Patsy, you might remain and entertain her till I come. Is she young or old?"

"Neither. She's older than I am and younger than you are; twenty-five, I reckon, and as swell as they make 'em. She's just the sort of looking woman that a man could fall in love with at first sight."

"Patsy," said Nick, with pretended sternness, "I am afraid you are growing old yourself."

"So was I when I looked at her," grinned Patsy.

When Nick entered the reception-room a few moments later, his guest rose to meet him, and he saw at a glance that Patsy had not exaggerated in his suggestive description of her, for it was at once evident that she was not only beautiful, but was unquestionably a person of quality, of high breeding, and of unusual force of character.

"You are Mr. Carter, I assume," she said, with perfect self-possession.

The detective bowed an assent.

"This is my card," she continued, giving it to him. "I am, as you will see, the Countess of Croydon, and I am staying, with my husband, the earl, at the Hotel Aberdonian, which is quite near the Waldorf. Before I left England, three weeks ago, I asked Inspector Pettus, of Scotland Yard, for the address of a detective on this side, and he gave me yours. I was, however, unfortunate enough to lose it, and could only remember your name and the vicinity of your house. If you are at liberty, Mr. Carter, I would like to secure your services."

"In what manner can I be of service, madam?" inquired Nick.

"My story is very short, very simple, and I have no doubt you will think it is also absurd. I might preface what I am to say by making the statement that in performing what I shall ask of you, I shall not consider the matter of expense. You are at liberty to make your own terms."

"I always do that, madam," said Nick, quietly.

"My husband, the earl, is more than twice my age," she continued, going directly to the point. "He is very rich and very susceptible to certain influences which I may describe in the one word, occult. He calls himself a mystic. He is an easy victim of any designing person, who can work upon his love for the mysterious. Just now I believe him to be on the point of becoming the prey of the worst class of people he has ever encountered, and it is to ask you to protect him against himself that I have come to you."

"What is the present danger, madam?"

"Devil worship."

"Indeed," said Nick. "May I ask how you know this to be so? And will you tell me what you mean by that term?"

"I know that we passed several months in Paris simply because he believed that he would find an opportunity to ally himself with the Devil Worshipers in

that city. I also know that he failed in his desires. After that we returned to London, but he had made an acquaintance in Paris who agreed to inform him when and where he could join the society, and that shortly before we started for this country, he received a letter that his wishes could be consummated here."

"And now?"

"He has found the Devil Worshipers; he has received his instructions, and Thursday night he is to attend a meeting where he will be initiated."

"How do you know this?"

"Partly from statements he has made, partly from expressions he has uttered while sleeping in his chair in the afternoons, and partly because when he went out to-day I played detective myself and followed him."

"And you found, did you not, the figure of a devil brandishing a spear, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fifth Street, a quarter circle at another corner, and so on, until at last on First Avenue near Twenty-third Street there were the figures 12 and 2 added together, making 14."

The woman stared at Nick in open-eyed astonishment.

"Would you mind telling me how in the world you knew that?" she asked.

"Certainly not. I have been told that the chalk marks were there, and that they are put there to furnish directions by which the knowing ones are able to determine where the Devil Worshipers are to meet. It is very simple, madam, and there is nothing supernatural about it, I assure you. Now, suppose you tell me how you knew what those marks were intended to mean, for if I am not mistaken, you did not follow your husband immediately."

Again she stared at him.

"You know that also?" she said.

"Yes; and for the same reason."

"I sent my maid to follow the earl on the opposite side of the street. I followed the maid, and, of course, I saw the marks."

"But how did you know they would be there?"

"The earl revealed that much to me while he slept."

"Also the meaning of the different marks?"

"He repeated word for word, the instructions he had received. For example, this is what he said: 'At the southwest corner of Thirty-fifth Street and Fifth Avenue, a devil brandishing a spear; follow the spear until you discover a quarter circle; follow the circle, or as many of them as you find, in the directions they indicate until you have found a second spear. If it contains one prong, the meeting will be to-morrow, two prongs will mean the day following, and three, the day following that. Go this time in the direction opposite the pointing of the spear, and until you find figures on the walk. They will indicate the hour before or after midnight when the meeting convenes, and they will be in front of the building where the meeting takes place.' Could anything have been plainer than that, sir?"

"Hardly."

"Now, sir, will you help me?"

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Prevent my husband from attending that meeting."

"I doubt if that can be done without his knowledge, and to prevent him by force might not be wise."

"No, it would not be wise."

"I might find a way to see that he is protected while he is there, and also to save him from any unpleasant consequences of his attendance."

"Could you do that?"

"Yes. I think I might engage to do that."

"Will you do so?"

"Yes. But I feel impelled to say this, madam. From the story you have told me, and for reasons of my own, I fear that you are in much greater danger at the hands of the Devil Worshipers than your husband can be. I doubt very much if you could have followed

your husband without their knowledge. If you will pardon me, I will ring for one of my assistants whom I would like to have you see, and who will follow and guard you when you leave this house."

"Do you suppose, sir, that these Devil Worshipers would dare to inflict personal injury upon me?"

"I think they would dare anything to secure your husband as a recruit to their ranks."

CHAPTER IV.

UNEARTHING A CONSPIRACY.

Instead of ringing the bell, Nick left the room for a moment, and, having sought his own study, called Patsy and Ten-Ichi to him.

"Now my lads," he said, speaking rapidly, "attend to what I shall say. You, Patsy, are to slip into a disguise so that the woman downstairs will not recognize you as one she has seen before. Then you will take your station outside the house and wait till she leaves here, when you will take her trail and never leave it until I call you off. Fix yourself so that you can make changes in your disguise without the necessity of returning here."

"Yes, sir."

When he had gone Nick turned to Ten-Ichi.

"The woman whom you saw following the chalk marks of the Devil Worshipers, is downstairs," he said.

"I expected as much, sir."

"I want to be sure that there is no mistake, and I also wish to assure myself that an opinion I have formed concerning her is the correct one, so first I will ask you a few questions. She tells me that the gentleman you followed is the Earl of Croydon and that she is his wife. Now, how far behind him was she when you first saw her?"

"Ten minutes at least, sir."

"Too far, then, to keep him in view."

"Decidedly."

"She says her maid followed the earl, and that she followed the maid. Did you see such a person?"

"No. There was no such person."

"On the opposite side of the street, I mean."

"There was no such person."

"You seem quite positive."

"I watched both sides of the street. Often when there are two members of a clique on an errand like that one, they take opposite sides of the street. I was on the lookout for that very circumstance. It did not occur."

"Good."

"Besides, she was too far behind the man. It would have required at least two persons between her and him to enable her to keep the trail."

"Then it seems certain that her only guide on that expedition was the chalk marks, themselves."

"I am sure of it. I am sure that she knew their significance as well as I did. Moreover, I am equally certain that she was very nervous. I have never seen a novice of a clique of Devil Worshipers who did not act in just that way."

"You would not suppose that she was ever nervous in her life if you were to talk with her now."

"Perhaps not; but she was nervous then."

"What is your own idea about her, Ten-Ichi?"

"The same that I formed at first. That she is a novice in this matter and that she is joining them for some special design. Women always have an especial reason for taking such a step; men's reasons are general."

"Right you are, Ten-Ichi. Now I am going back to her. I'll give you ten minutes to fix yourself so that your own mother wouldn't know you, and then come to the reception room. I want you to conduct her back to her hotel."

"I'll be there inside of ten minutes, sir."

And he was.

Nick could not repress a smile when Ten-Ichi entered the room, but it was a smile of satisfaction, for in the short time that had been allotted to him, Ten-Ichi had performed a remarkable transformation. His complexion was ruddy, his cheeks were puffed out as if with fat, his hair was bright red, and the grin on his face was as distinctly Irish as if it hailed directly from Wexford.

"This young man is Mr. Murphy," said Nick, when Ten-Ichi entered. "He will follow you at a respectful distance and see that no harm befalls you, madam."

"But, sir," she replied, "you have not yet told me what measures you would take to protect my husband from the consequences of his acts."

"Because I have not yet determined upon that point, madam. According to your own statement, we have until two o'clock Friday morning before my active services will be necessary, and, in the meantime, I will communicate with you."

"Not at my hotel! That is, not in the presence of the earl."

"I will see to it that the earl is not present when I call."

"I think I may rely upon you, Mr. Carter."

"You certainly can."

Two minutes after they left the house Nick was also in the street, but had the woman met him half a block away—which he took good care she did not do—she would not have recognized him.

He had hastily made himself up in the guise of a clergyman who had arrived at the middle age of life, and when the Countess of Croyden entered the Hotel Aberdonian half an hour later, he had already registered and been assigned to a room.

As soon as he felt assured that she had gone to her apartments and removed her wraps, the detective applied again at the desk.

"I am told," he said, "that the Earl and Countess of Croyden are stopping here. Will you be good enough to send this card to the earl?" He gave the clerk a neatly engraved card which bore the name, "Rev. James Augustus Stanton," and five minutes later he was ushered into the presence of the earl.

"I must apologize for this unwarranted intrusion, my lord," said Nick, affably, as he acknowledged the earl's somewhat haughty bow, "but I have been sent to you for the purpose of informing you of a very unpleasant fact, and I may add that I was selected for this mission because I am a clergyman. May I be assured that we will not be overheard?"

"We are entirely alone, sir. Be seated," replied the earl, coldly.

"I was instructed to be exceedingly cautious inasmuch as you would be deeply offended if the purpose of my errand should become known to other than ourselves," said Nick, and he deftly crossed the room and examined a door which connected with an adjoining room, as if to be certain that it was closed. Then, before the earl had time to remonstrate upon his strange behavior, he returned, and half stooping over the earl, said, in a very low tone and a deeply mysterious air:

"I have come here in regard to the Devil Worshiper, my lord."

The effect upon the earl was electric. He half sprang from his chair and then subsided again. His face turned to ashen whiteness, and in a voice that was totally unlike his own, he muttered in repetition:

"Devil Worshipers!"

"Precisely," said Nick, still in a tone that was almost a whisper.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"They are here, my lord."

"Here?"

"Not in this room, of course, but here in this city."

"Well, sir, I still fail to understand what you are driving at."

The earl had recovered himself and was now plainly indignant.

"I have been sent here to tell you that the countess, your wife, is again making an attempt to ally herself with a clique of Devil Worshipers."

"The devil you were!"

"My lord, I hope you will so far respect the cloth I wear as not to forget yourself to the extent of swearing in my presence."

"Humph!" grunted the earl. "Who sent you here?"

"A gentleman who wishes to befriend you. I am not at liberty now, to tell you his name, but that will come later, and in good time."

"Who are you, sir?"

"You have my card."

"Bah! That tells me nothing. Are you really a clergyman?"

"At your service, my lord. Let me ask you a few questions. Did you not walk out upon the street today in search of the signs of the Devil Worshipers, and did you not discover those signs?"

"I certainly did, but how in the dev——"

"Tut-tut, sir. You followed them, did you not?"

"Well, suppose I did?"

"What did you discover from them?"

"Not a blessed thing, by Jove!"

"You could not expect to find a blessed thing in such company, my lord," said the detective, coldly, shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, not a damned thing, then, if that suits you better. Look here, sir, I don't know who you are or who sent you here; I don't know what your object in coming here may be, and for that matter, I don't know that you are not one of that infernal set yourself, in spite of the cloth you wear. Now if you have got anything to say to me, say it, and say it to the point—or get out."

"My dear sir, it is my intention to say what I was sent here to say, and as nearly to the point as possible, but I must ask you to be patient, and to permit me to proceed in my own way."

"All right. Go ahead," said the earl, wearily. "I'm resigned. Take your time, but"—he rose from his chair and crossed the room to a desk that stood in one corner, pulled out a drawer, and took a revolver in his hand and raised the hammer; then he returned and resumed his seat, while he continued, coldly—"but I give you fair warning that you shall not leave this room until I know who you are, who sent you here, and—but fire away with what you have to say. I'm waiting."

"Before we go any farther in this discussion, sir," said Nick, calmly, "I have this to say, and the purport has occurred to me since I entered this room, and I may add that it has altered every motive that I had in coming here. Your extraordinary resemblance to a man, whom I had an opportunity to meet but once, compels me to ask you if the family name of your house is Thompson; and to add that if I am correct in supposing it is, you had best put aside your weapon, make sure that we cannot be overheard, and then listen calmly to what I will have to say."

"Humph! My family name is Thompson; but what of that?"

"Then, am I also correct in stating that you had an elder brother who wore the title before you, who disappeared some time ago, and to whose title as the Earl of Croyden you have succeeded only because the courts of England have declared him dead?"

"Good heavens, man, is my brother alive?"

"And if he were, my lord?"

"If he were! My God! Do you suppose that this puny title would stand between us? Is that what you

mean? No; it cannot be that. God knows I made every effort to find him, and that it was only after I had been urged and urged—but what do you mean? Is my brother alive?"

"No, my lord, he is dead. He died by the hand of an assassin, less than two weeks ago."

"Less than two weeks ago! I have worn his title almost two years. Where has he been during that time while we were turning the world upside down to find him? Murdered, you say! Who killed him? By all the gods, man, if you will show me who——"

"Hush!" said Nick. "You must not excite yourself, for I have a long and bitter story to tell you; but first let me assure you of one thing, and that is that miracles still happen in this world. When I entered this room I had no idea that there could be any connection between the Earl of Croydon and the man whom I knew as Mr. Thompson, but the instant I crossed that threshold, the extraordinary resemblance you bear to him impressed me with the conviction that you were brothers."

He paused an instant, and then, with marked emphasis, added:

"But it has done more than that, sir. I came here to see you, because circumstances have come to my knowledge to-day which indicated that you were being drawn into the toils of a conspiracy, and I came to save you, and to find out, if possible, what the conspiracy might be. Now, since I have connected your identity with Thompson's, I believe I know what it is, and why you are its intended victim. My lord, I am Nick Carter, and I am at your service."

CHAPTER V.

THE CURSE OF DAZAAR.

For a moment the earl started at the detective in speechless surprise.

"You are Nick Carter, the detective!" he exclaimed. claimed.

He started forward with outstretched hand, but came to a halt before he reached the detective, and drawing one hand wearily across his brow, said, hesitatingly:

"How am I to know that, sir? How do I know that you are not a part and parcel with the devils incarnate who have pursued my family through three generations? I have been fooled before, how am I to know that you are not deceiving me now?"

"Wait until you hear me through," said Nick, in reply. "I do not censure you for doubting me. I think it quite natural and reasonable that you should do so. This morning, by mere chance, one of my assistants discovered the meeting of the clique sign on the pavement at the corner of Thirty-fifth Street. He watched the sign until you came upon it a few moments later, and he followed you until you came to the spot where the figures are written on the walk in front of a house on First Avenue. There he left you and returned along the route he had followed."

"He followed me no farther than that point, then?"

"No."

"Very well. Go on, please."

"On his way returning, he met a woman whose appearance led him to take especial notice of her. She was also following the signs."

"And that woman was the countess? My wife?"

"So it proved, later, although he had no idea of the fact at that time. But about an hour ago she came to my house in search of me, stating that she had been directed to me by Inspector Pettus of Scotland Yard."

The earl smiled coldly.

"Inspector Pettus is my friend, not hers," he said.

"So I infer—now. She wished to secure my services for the purpose of protecting you from yourself, and to explain that statement, she said that you had

long been searching an opportunity of allying yourself with the Devil Worshipers; that you had made determined efforts to do so in Paris, and in London, and that you had been directed to come to America for that purpose; that you had revealed your secrets to her in your sleep, and that she followed you to-day when you sought out the chalk marks on the pavement. She wished me to prevent you from any attempt to attend that meeting."

"Go on, Mr. Carter. When you have finished I will have something to say."

"First, let me ask two or three questions. Do you know where that meeting is to take place?"

"No. Not unless it happens to be in the house in front of which I found the figures 12, 2 and 14. I searched the entire neighborhood in every direction from that point, and could find no other marks. That is why I asked you if your assistant followed me after we arrived at that point. If he had done so he would have understood me better."

"Doubtless. Now; you did not understand the meaning of those figures, did you?"

"Not unless they had some reference to the hour of midnight, which, being made by Devil Worshipers, they doubtless did. I took them to mean two hours after midnight, so acting upon that idea, I should have gone to that house at two o'clock to-morrow morning with a competent guard, and—well, if the countess happened to be there, I would have found it out."

"My lord, you might not have made a bad detective had you been educated to the business while you were young. The meeting is to take place in that house and it will be held at two o'clock in the morning, but not to-night."

"No? When, then?"

"Before I reply to your question, let me ask you another. Why, when you found the second pronged spear on the sidewalk, did you not follow the direction in which it pointed, instead of taking the opposite way?"

"Because Inspector Pettus suggested it. I have followed those signs before, and never have succeeded in discovering any sign beyond the second spear. I told him of that, and he suggested that it might be intended to mislead, and that the next time I take the opposite direction."

"Now, how did you happen to follow them at all? How did you know that the marks would be made to-day, and how did you know where to look for them?"

"I followed them because I found them, but I did not know they would be made to-day, and I did not know where to look for them."

"Then how——"

"Wait, please. Before I went to that corner in search of them, I had searched the corners in every other direction from this hotel. If I had not found them there I would have returned to this hotel and waited until to-morrow, when I should have renewed the search. In other words, sir, I knew by experience that sooner or later those marks would appear on the corner of one of the streets adjacent to this hotel. I have been looking for them for ten days, counting to-day. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do."

"In whatever city I visit with the countess, sooner or later those marks appear."

"And you have never been able to trace them till to-day?"

"Never so well as to-day."

"Is the countess conscious of your long search?"

"I am sure she never knew of it till to-day, and I had no idea that she knew of it now until you came."

"How do you account for her knowledge of the matter now?"

"Simply that I was seen to follow the trail by some person or persons who informed her of it."

"By one of the Devil Worshipers, in fact?"

"Yes."

"She says that you call yourself a mystic."

"She says what is not true, for I despise mysticism in any form."

"What is your idea of her motive in coming to me, as she did?"

"To find a means of preventing me from surprising her attendance at the meeting. In short, to open the

way so that she could attend it—so that I could not prevent her from going there."

"But she betrayed the place of meeting to me."

"Then, sir, be assured that the place has been changed, and that there will be other signs to read on the pavement, somewhere, at some time."

"By Jove, sir, you are right. I had not thought of that. It has been said that the best detective work is accomplished with the brains of another man, and this suggestion of yours seems to uphold that theory."

"You could not work at all without suggestions," said the earl, smiling drearily. "It is the power of adapting them to, and connecting them with circumstances that makes the great detective, as I understand it."

"That meeting was appointed for Thursday night, instead of to-night," said the detective.

"How do you understand that?"

"By the number of prongs on the second spear. One prong would have meant to-morrow; two the day after, and so on."

"Thank you. I will not forget that."

"Now, sir, I had arrived at the conclusion, judging from the conduct of the countess, that she was, or rather is, a novice in devil worship. Your statements would indicate that she has long been associated with them. What have you to say about that?"

"This: I do not think she has ever attended a meeting such as this one, for the reason that I have managed to prevent her from doing so, so in that respect she is a novice, as you say; but on the other hand, I think she has associated herself with Devil Worshipers since about the time of the disappearance of my brother, which was three years ago, and within a year after our marriage."

"Good. That gives me another point. Now tell me how you first discovered her association with them?"

"By walking in upon an impromptu gathering at my country seat in Dorset."

"I see. They did not expect you."

"No. I had returned unexpectedly from Paris. I watched them for several minutes without their knowledge, and they explained it under the pretext of mere sport. I accepted the explanation at the time, but later, in describing the incident to a friend in Rome, he put me on the right track, for he had himself been made a victim of their uncanny plots."

"And since that time you have watched and waited."

"Exactly. Now, sir, I have been very patient, I think. Won't you tell me about my brother?"

"I know nothing about him save this: He stopped me one day while I was crossing Union Square on my way home. I talked with him perhaps five minutes. He said his name was Thompson, and he made an appointment to meet me at my house later. I never saw him alive after that first meeting. He arrived at my house at the appointed time, but he was dead. A dagger had been thrown through the window of the cab and had pierced his heart. I have not yet been able to arrest his murderer, but I know that he is a person who calls himself Dazaar."

"Dazaar! My God!"

The earl leaped to his feet and staggered against the wall, perspiration standing in beads upon his forehead, while Nick watched him narrowly.

"That fiend!" he gasped. "That fiend? If he is on our track again, then Heaven help us all! I thought he was dead."

"Tell me what you know about him," said Nick.

"I do not know anything about him, save that it is the name of the curse of our family and has been so for three generations, as I said a moment since. My grandfather and his brothers and sisters; my father and mother and my father's brothers and sisters, and last, my own brothers and sisters, until I am the only one who is left alive, have all fallen under the curse of that name. To the members of my own generation, Dazaar is only a name, for he has never appeared to us, but every child born into our family has been taught the curse of Dazaar, and each one has grown up in horror of it. I believed him to be dead at last, and now I find that he lives still, and that he is the murderer of my brother. God help me now, for I am lost!"

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S COUNTERPLOT.

"When I entered this room," said Nick, slowly, "I thought you were a brave man, afraid of nothing, and now I find you cringing like a whipped hound at the mere mention of the name of Dazaar. Pardon me, but that is not like an Englishman of your caliber."

The earl straightened up proudly.

"Thank you," he said, with dignity. "You did right to call me to myself. I am not a coward, and could I bring myself face to face with Dazaar, I would not hesitate to attack him if he represented seventy devils instead of seven, as I am told. I was overwhelmed, not frightened."

"I can understand that, sir."

"My life is a sad one, Mr. Carter. I am much older than my wife, but our marriage was induced by love alone, for she was even higher in place than I. I love her still with the same devotion I bestowed upon her then, and there are times when I believe that she loves me. There are also times when I think she hates me—when she seems to be bewitched—when she is possessed by a fiend."

"And this began about the time you have stated; that is, within a year after your marriage?"

"Yes."

"Four years ago?"

"About that, yes."

Nick left his chair and walked to the window, where he stood for a full minute, looking out upon the street. Then he returned to his seat.

"My lord," he said, "if you will consent to place yourself entirely in my hands and to be guided in all things by me for a little while, I think we can conquer your enemies and mine, for Dazaar has sworn my life away, as well as yours. Will you consent to this?"

"May I ask what it would involve?"

"Implicit obedience without question, to every suggestion I may make, no matter what the apparent reason for it may seem to be, and absolute silence regarding our compact, so that no other person—your wife least of all—may know of our relations."

"Very well, sir. I will agree."

"Thank you. Now listen: We have decided that the meeting that was arranged for Thursday night will probably be postponed. I will take measures to ascertain at once if that is true, and if so, when it is to take place. If you will purchase a paper to-morrow morning at nine o'clock from a man with a shade over his right eye, who will be standing just outside the door of this hotel, and if you will take the paper he gives you without question, and do not open its folds until you have locked yourself in this room, alone, you will find that it contains a letter addressed to you. Read the letter and destroy it, but follow its directions implicitly. Will you do that?"

"I will."

"Now, another thing. We have been together a long time. If the countess happened to be aware of my coming, she will doubtless wonder about us. I think if you will go to her now and——"

"But she it not here."

"Oh, yes she is. She returned before I came. If you will go to her now and say that I was asked to call upon you by one of your clerical friends in England, no matter whom, only mention the name in my hearing, so that I will know what it is, and that I also begged to be presented to her, it will be the right thing to do and will relieve her suspicions. Pretend that you are annoyed, and apologize for asking her to meet me. Do not insist upon it, and there will be no harm if she refuses. After I have been presented I will take my departure, and as I am going you must, in your haughtiest and most freezing tones, ask me to call again while you are in the city."

"I understand," said the earl, his face lighting with the first expression of anything approaching amusement that Nick had seen upon it. "Wait here."

He went rapidly out of the room into an adjoining one, and Nick hat in hand and standing near the door, waited his return. Presently he reappeared.

"I find, sir," he said, freezingly, speaking from the threshold of the open door, "that the countess is very much engaged. She is, in fact, entertaining company, but if you will step this way she will receive you for a moment."

"So very kind of her," replied Nick in the smoothest and oiliest of parsonage voices. "I shall consider it a great, a very great honor, my lord. Thank you so much."

Then, following the earl, he stepped through the doorway into the adjoining room, and thence across that one to the room beyond, and it was well that he always held himself well in hand and quite prepared for emergencies, for otherwise he would unquestionably have betrayed the intense astonishment he experienced when he discovered in whose presence he was.

Seated in a low chair beside the countess, and idly fanning herself with a cluster of three American Beauty roses, was Irma Plavatski, as beautiful, as bewitching and as self-possessed as if she were in her own castle thousands of leagues away from the vicinity of Nick Carter and the machinations of Dazaar.

But it was only one quick and fleeting glance that the detective bestowed upon her; then he was bowing low before both women, while the earl was saying:

"Madam, this is the Rev. Mr. James Augustus Stanton, a friend of the dean of Trueberry. Mr. Stanton, my wife, the Countess of Croydon and her friend, Princess Plavatski."

The detective bowed almost to the floor in seeming ecstasy over the honor that had been accorded to him. He rolled his eyes and seemed to make a desperate effort to speak, and presently did murmur:

"A countess and a princess! Indeed, your royal highness and your grace—ah! this is too much honor! Too much honor."

The ladies (!) acknowledged the introduction merely by nodding their heads, and without rising, immediately resuming their conversation with each other, and Nick, as if overwhelmed, stood twirling his hat in his hands as if he did not know what to do next.

"I trust, sir, that we shall have the pleasure of seeing you again while we are in the city," said the earl, and Nick almost gave him a glance of admiration, so well did he obey instructions. His voice might have frozen the mercury in a thermometer, it was so cold.

When Nick reached the sidewalk outside the hotel, he discovered Patsy, who had a bundle of evening papers under one arm and a blacking box slung across the other shoulder.

"Here, cub," he called, changing his voice so utterly that even Patsy had no idea who he was.

"Shine yer own shoes, mister," said Patsy. "I ain't no cub any more'n you're an angel."

"Come along here a few steps, lad," continued the detective, changing his tones so that he would be recognized, but Patsy, always full of mischief, kept his place.

"It'll cost you a quarter now, boss," he said.

"All right," said Nick; and then, when Patsy had got to work: "Where is Ten-Ichi?"

"Gone home. I don't know why you had to put two of us onto the same woman. Were you afraid I'd lose her?"

"No, Pat, but I was afraid that she might discover that she was followed. She's uncommonly sharp, so I sent Ten-Ichi to guard her, with her permission, and to make her think she had really fooled me. What's the matter with you, lad, are you jealous of the Jap?"

"Not on your life."

"Don't you like him?"

"Down to the ground."

"Well, what is the matter, then?"

"Nothing, only I wish I knew as much as he does. Say, chief, he's a honey cooler, he is! He can give Chick and me both cards and spades about some things; but he's a mighty good little chap, and I'm glad we've got him."

"Good, Patsy. That's the way to talk. Through with the shine? All right. Keep your eyes open, lad. We're on the right scent this time, and I found it where I least expected it. If the countess comes out, don't lose her."

Twenty minutes later the detective was in his own house and Ten-Ichi was before him.

"Well, Ten-Ichi," he said, "you took the countess to the hotel safely?"

"Quite so, sir," replied Ten-Ichi.

"And then?"

"I hung around a little while, spoke to Patsy, and then——"

"You saw Irma Plavatski."

"No, I didn't see her, but I smelt her."

"Eh? How was that?"

"I smelled her and heard her, which was about as effective as seeing her."

"Right. How was it?"

"I was on the point of coming away, when a carriage drove up to the door. I was right near by, and when a woman got down from it and walked past us, I caught a whiff of the perfume that Irma Plavatski uses. That was enough. I knew her at once, although her veil was too thick to see through it, and her figure was concealed by the coat she wore."

"And then?"

"She told the driver to return for her at ten to-night. She spoke very low, but my ears are sharp. I heard her, and I recognized her voice."

"I saw her inside the hotel. She was with the countess."

"That is where I thought she was going, although I had no reason for thinking so."

"I want you to be back there at ten to-night, Ten-Ichi."

"Yes, sir."

"And I want you to do the best work you ever did in your life in following her. It will be a mighty difficult thing to do, too."

"Why, sir?"

"Because, without doubt there will be at least one, and perhaps several who will be on the watch to see if she is followed. That is the game of that outfit, Ten-Ichi. They shadow their own people so that if anybody else tries to do it they are on to the fact in a second."

"I had thought of that, sir, but they won't catch Ten-Ichi. Perhaps you intend to be there also?"

"Perhaps I do. We will see; but whether I am there or not, remember that I rely upon you."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WILES OF THE PRINCESS IRMA.

"But there is one thing you will have to attend to in addition to that," said Nick.

"Now?"

"I cannot answer that. You will have to answer it yourself. It has occurred to me that your friends, the Devil Worshipers, intend to change the time and place of their meeting."

"They always do that, sir."

"But you did not inform me of that fact."

"I should have done so."

"Will you be able to find out where they meet?"

"Easily."

"How?"

"Thursday noon there will be new marks in chalk in front of the house where the figures were made. For example, we will say that the new figures will be 3 N. That will mean that three blocks or streets to the north, at about the same place in the block there will be other figures. When the next marking is found it may read simply a W, which will mean to walk to the west till another is found. There may be several other markings in different places, or in only two or three, depending upon the amount of caution they think it necessary to exercise, but at last there will be found a circle with a figure inside it—1, 2, or 3, which means to-morrow night, next night, or the night after. The figure, whatever it is, will touch the top or the bottom of the circle, and that will also indicate that the meeting will take place in the first, second or third house beyond the figure, in that direction."

"Good! That is easy. And the hour?"

"That will be the same. It is not changed after the first announcement."

"So there will be no use in looking out for those signs before Thursday night?"

"No. They don't know themselves yet where the meeting will be held. Only the ruler knows that, and even he may not yet have decided."

* * * * * * *

At half-past nine o'clock that night Nick Carter again entered the Hotel Aberdonian.

In appearance he was a busy traveling man with the weight of great business affairs on his mind, and not at all like any other character we have seen him assume.

He wore a derby hat that seemed to be tight for him,

a light, fall overcoat that came only a few inches below his hips, and in other respects his attire suggested freedom of limb and action, neatness and elegance. Sandy hair and mustache and an aggressive bunch of whiskers on his chin added materially to the make-up, and as he strode rapidly through the office of the hotel and handed his grip to a bellboy, nobody would have supposed that he had ever heard of the great detective, Nick Carter.

"I'd like to have 342, if it is vacant," he said. "I have never stopped here before, simply because I have never been inside the town before, but I was directed here and told to secure that room if possible.

He had noticed when he left the apartments of the earl, that 342 was exactly opposite the door which communicated with the room where the countess was entertaining Irma Plavatski, and so, for more reasons than one, he desired to secure it.

Fortunately it was unoccupied, and in a very few moments he was inside, with the door wide open and a paper which he appeared to be intently reading, before him.

But he had seated himself so that he could command a perfect view of the door on the opposite side of the hall through which he expected to see Irma Plavatski appear; and also, the location was such that any person coming from any room belonging to the earl's suite must perforce pass his door to reach the elevators.

Nick thought it best to leave his own door wide open, for in that way he could command not only a clear view, but he would be less likely to arouse suspicion in the mind of Irma, who proved herself a thousand times more shrewd than he had supposed her to be. In fact he had decided if the opportunity offered, to play the part of the cheeky traveling man who believes that all women admire him, and who does not hesitate to ogle and simper, or even to wink, if the occasion offers, at all of them.

He believed that by affronting her in that manner he would be less likely to arouse her suspicions that he was watching her for other purposes than that of the solely masculine desire to make her acquaintance.

He well knew that she could not have been long in the city of New York (to the shame of that city, be it said) without encountering on every street and in every corridor men of that stamp and character.

It was a part which he infinitely disliked to play, but as we all know, the detective was not one to draw back from a necessary *rôle* for the mere reason of personal objection against its assumption.

As the moment that Irma had announced as the time of her leaving the apartments of the countess approached, Nick became especially alert, but the moments crept past the time until it was ten minutes past ten before there was any sign of activity from the opposite room.

Then, however, the door opened and Nick discovered, not without some astonishment, that it was the earl who appeared upon the threshold.

For an instant the detective believed that the nobleman hesitated, but it was only for an instant, for then both the countess and Irma appeared in the doorway with him.

But here again was another puzzle, for while the earl was arrayed in hat and coat and held his omnipresent cane in one hand, the ladies evidently had no intention of going out, for neither of them wore hat nor wrap.

At once, also, the detective was disarmed against suspicion by a remark made by Irma, addressing the earl.

"We will go to the elevator with you, and I will wait here with the countess till you return," she said, so Nick settled back in his chair again and continued, or appeared to continue the perusal of his paper.

Presently the women returned to the room alone, entered it and closed the door.

The idea of following the earl from the hotel had not occurred to the detective, and yet had he done so he would have been spared much trouble and annoyance.

The fact was, that although he was beginning to regard Irma Plavatski as belonging pretty close to the top among the smartest women he had ever known, he was far from giving her credit for her full capability.

He had yet to discover much concerning her, and

was yet to be forced to the admission that she was head and shoulders above anybody he had ever met, for shrewdness and duplicity.

But even Nick Carter cannot be supposed to be always and entirely above the uncertain qualities of a woman's mind, and Irma Plavatski was an unusual woman, as he was destined soon to discover.

After the two women returned to the apartments of the earl, more than an hour elapsed before the detective was conscious of another move in that quarter, and he had begun to wonder why the earl did not return when the door opened again, and Irma came into view.

Nick had stepped into the hall when she appeared, and was in the act of closing his own door with the intention of strolling up and down the hallway, so that he actually seemed to be naturally in the act of going out when she appeared.

She was fully dressed for the street, and the countess, who followed her, was not, so the detective knew that the time for him to act had arrived.

He fumbled over his key in the lock of the door for a moment in order to gain time, and then walked directly to the elevator, intending to gain the ground floor and also the street, if possible, before she could follow, but greatly to his surprise, she did not linger over her good-nights with the countess, and so in another moment Nick found himself standing alone in the upper hallway of the hotel beside Irma Plavatski, while they both awaited the coming of the elevator, which for some reason seemed to be delayed.

Presently, as it did not appear, Nick rang again, and then again, and then a third time, whereupon a bell-boy appeared, breathless from running up the stairs, and announced that they would have to take the elevator at the other end of the corridor as that one was temporarily out of order.

It afforded an opportunity which was altogether too opportune to ignore, and Nick seized upon it, so turning to Irma, and disguising his voice to perfection, he smiled and said:

"Well, madam, it seems that we will have to walk to the other end of the building, or walk down the stairs. In distance it amounts to about the same thing. Which shall we do?"

"Are we very high up?" she asked, demurely.

"Oh, no," he replied, delighted to find her so affable. "This is only the third floor. There are two flights of stairs to descend."

"Then I vote that we walk," she said, smiling back at him, but at the same instant drawing her veil so that her features were hidden.

"It won't be quite so easy to do that now as it was a moment ago," he said.

"Why not?" she asked.

"You have turned off the lights."

"Turned off the lights? I don't think I understand."

"Pardon me, madam, but it seemed as if the lights of the world went out when you screened them behind that veil."

Irma permitted herself to laugh merrily.

"One might suppose you to be a Frenchman," she said, archly.

"Well, I'm not. I'm from Chicago."

"Indeed! Is Chicago in this country? You must understand that I am a stranger here."

"Chicago, madam, is the metropolis of the great West."

"Ah! Don't you think, sir, that we had best go down, if we are going?"

"By all means. Shall I have the honor to conduct you to your carriage?"

"If you will be so kind, sir—that is, if my carriage is waiting."

They had started down the stairs by this time, and she continued, in explanation of her last remark:

"I ordered my carriage to be in waiting for me at ten, but at that hour I foolishly loaned it to the Earl of Croydon. He expected to return in half an hour, but as more than an hour passed and he did not come back, I decided not to wait longer, so I hardly expect to find it below."

"And in that case what will you do?"

"Why, take one of the hotel cabs, or walk. I have not far to go. The evening is beautiful, as I discovered

from the window of the hotel, and the streets are lighted."

"I wonder," said Nick, slowly, and measuring his words with great care, at the same time toning his voice to an ultra respectable monotone, "I wonder if you would take offense or misconstrue my motives if under the circumstances I were to offer you my escort."

"Most certainly I will not misconstrue your motives," she retorted, and there was the suggestion of a peculiar ring in her voice as she made the remark, to which Nick paid no heed at the time, but which recurred to him later with unmistakable force.

"Then if you will accept my services——"

"I will be very grateful to you, sir."

They stepped from the last stairway upon the corridor of the ground floor as she made the last remark, and in another moment were in the street. There, Nick paused.

"Which shall it be?" asked Nick. "Shall I call a cab, or, if indeed you have not far to go so that it will tire you, shall we walk?"

"Since I have an escort I should like to walk, at least part of the way," she replied. "I have been shut up in that room with the countess, whom I have been calling upon, all the afternoon, and the fresh air seems good to me."

"Which way?" asked Nick as they arrived at the corner of Fifth Avenue.

"Uptown," she said, turning the corner. "I am stopping in Fifty-ninth Street, fronting the park."

"Indeed! Why, that is more than a mile from here."

"Does that seem far? Would you prefer to put me in a cab? Perhaps I am keeping you from an engagement, or——"

"Not at all. Don't think of such a thing, I beg you. I remembered that you are a stranger in the city and thought that perhaps you did not know the distance. I assure you that I——"

Again she laughed merrily; so merrily and so contageously, in fact, that he laughed with her; and then, as if to explain her action, she said:

"Really, sir, this is quite a lark. I suppose you are not accustomed to foreign women, and that in this country you would call this episode a flirtation. See! I meet you in the corridor of the hotel as if by appointment, having sent my carriage away purposely; you pay me a beautiful compliment and I reward you by—what shall I say?—entrapping you?"

"By entrancing me, let us say."

"No, I like the other expression better. I reward you by entrapping you. Really, sir, this is a genuine lark, and"—archly—"please remember that there is many a true word spoken in jest."

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER THROWS ASIDE HIS MASK.

Nick Carter could never quite understand why he did not comprehend the significance of Irma Plavatski's laughing warning, when she so archly told him that she had entrapped him, and that there was many a true word spoken in jest.

The truth was that he had no idea that she had guessed his identity.

He had found it so easy to deceive others in his career, that it did not once occur to him that the keen and beautiful eyes of Irma Plavatski, having seen and studied him once in his own proper person, could thereafter pierce through any disguise he might assume, almost without a failure.

The keystone of successful disguising on the part of a detective is never to permit the world at large to know the real person, and Nick Carter had rarely in his career made his real identity known to the world at large.

In Wall Street and the banking districts of the city, he was known and recognized under one character; among railroad officials he assumed another; for general detective work he had a third disguise, and so on through the gamut, but to very few persons did he permit himself to appear as he really was and is.

But on the occasion of his first meeting with Irma Plavatski, something had induced him to lay aside all disguise, and to appear before her as the genuine Nick Carter, and the consequence of that act he was about to reap, for if the truth be told Irma recognized him

on the instant that he appeared in the apartments of the earl, disguised as a clergyman of the English church, and she knew very well that he would return.

Accordingly, without once leaving the countess' rooms, she plotted the little trap into which he was walking with his eyes wide open.

It was almost an unprecedented thing for Nick Carter to do, to be off his guard, even for a moment, but for once his own magnificent abilities overshot the mark.

When Irma came to the door with the countess to send the earl away, she had seen the man in the room opposite, reading his paper, and although she could not determine then that he was the detective, she felt assured that he was.

Later, when she met him at the elevator, she was, of course, certain.

The plans she was carrying out now, to entrap him, had been arranged during the interval that had elapsed while he went to his home to interview Ten-Ichi, and —but it was a much deeper and more far-reaching plot than he could have imagined even if he had suspected her, which he did not.

Irma, evidently alarmed by her own temerity in uttering so plain a warning, did not again refer to the occasion of their strange (?) meeting, but discoursed rapidly and brilliantly, too, upon any and every subject that occurred to her or was suggested by him during their promenade, so that the time seemed all too short when they arrived at Fifty-eighth Street, passed in front of the Plaza Hotel and turned westward along Fifty-ninth.

"This has been a most delightful walk," said Irma, as they turned. "Really it has seemed only a moment since we left the Aberdonian."

"And even shorter than that to me," responded Nick, gallantly.

"If you are from Chicago," she continued, "you are almost as much a stranger in this city as I am. I am told that this is one of the most attractive sections of the city."

"It is, indeed," said Nick.

"We have only a few more steps to go now," she added, presently. "This is the house where I am stopping."

The utter and profound astonishment which the detective experienced at that announcement found no expression whatever upon his features, but what he felt inside was almost overwhelming, for he was standing with one foot upon the lower step of the very house where the banker, Simon Gray, had lived, and where he had died with the sign of the dagger upon his temple, and where his daughter, Miriam, now resided.

The house, too, was ablaze with light, almost as if a party were being entertained within it; and this, Irma at once explained.

"One would think that my friend, Miss Gray, were entertaining company," she said, pausing as if to give weight to her words, "but the truth is that she is suffering under a black cloud of sorrow. She has recently lost her father, who died suddenly and somewhat mysteriously. Since that time she cannot bear to be alone a moment, and throughout the nights she keeps the rooms of the house lighted to their fullest capacity. Only after she has retired do the servants dare to extinguish them. Will you ring for me, please?"

It had been Nick's intention to leave Irma at the door without a word other than an ordinary "good-night" being said, but now he found himself confronted by a complication upon which he had not calculated, and the thoughts that ran rapidly through his mind were something like these:

"If Irma Plavatski is living here with Miriam Gray, Dazaar has access to the house, and therefore Miriam is in great and grave and imminent danger. I must not leave her a moment unprotected, even if I run the risk of hurrying my plans too precipitately. When Irma Plavatski passes inside the door I will follow, and if necessary declare myself, come what may."

Then the very next words uttered by the woman put the seal upon his decision and rendered it final, for she said:

"When I am out, Miss Gray always waits up for me, and she will be waiting now. If you will forgive the unconventionality of the proceeding, really, sir, I should like you to step inside for a moment and make

her acquaintance. But"—then she laughed again—"you haven't even told me your name, so how shall I be able to present you to her?"

Nick had pressed the button in the meantime, and now the door opened. He half-expected to see Moses, the old servitor of the house, in the doorway, but it was a strange servant who had come to admit them, so more than ever determined to see the adventure through to the end, Nick stepped quickly across the threshold and passed, hat in hand, across the hall into the brilliantly lighted parlor without responding to her request for his name.

"She'll find that out soon enough," was his grim thought, "and when she hears it it will be the right one."

The folding doors at the end of the room, connecting with what might be termed the back parlor, were open, and although the aperture was more than half concealed by heavy curtains, Nick could see that the second room was also lighted and that it was occupied.

But Irma passed him quickly and led the way toward the rear room, bidding him to "come with me, please," as she did so; and he obeyed.

Miriam was seated in a large chair near the open fire in the grate, but there was no sign of recognition in her eyes when she looked up at him, and Nick almost smiled at his resentment of that fact when he remembered that, of course, she would not recognize him in the disguise he wore.

But there was another difference than the mere want of recognition, as he observed in a second glance at her; but even as he took notice of that fact Irma addressed him again.

"Have you forgotten, sir, that you have not told me your name? So pray, how am I to present you to my friend? Miriam," she added, "this gentleman has been kind enough to act as my escort, but he seems disinclined to tell me who he is."

"My name is Carter—Nick Carter," said Nick, coldly, confidently expecting that Irma would turn upon him like a tigress, and that Miriam would leap to her feet in utter astonishment and with unconcealed pleasure, for he did not doubt that she would welcome his unexpected and unheralded presence with genuine joy.

Indeed, he already reproached himself bitterly for his neglect of her.

But neither incident occurred.

Miriam did not stir at the announcement, and Irma calmly proceeded with the introduction, as if she had never heard the name before.

"Miss Gray," she said, with just the suggestion of a ripple of laughter in her voice, "let me present Mr. Carter; Mr. Nick Carter, a gallant gentleman who has protected me from the awful dangers of the streets of New York."

Miriam rose from her chair, bowed and resumed her seat without speaking, and Irma turned to him, still with her matchless eyes filled with laughter.

"Won't you be seated, Mr. Carter?" she said.

The detective was amazed, and not half so much by the incident itself as by the incomparable effrontery of Irma Plavatski. He understood also that Miriam was not responsible for her conduct, and that she was either under the influence of a drug, or that she had been hypnotized, and, for the first time, he understood that he had indeed been entrapped.

To attempt to wear the mask any longer, he knew would be utter folly, and so he threw it aside without a moment's hesitation.

"It would appear, Mademoiselle Plavatski, that you had never heard my name before," he said, with cutting coldness.

"Would it, indeed?" she replied, smiling archly at him, and dropping into a convenient chair with all the abandon of one who is fatigued. "You see, I knew that you were at the hotel awaiting me, for I recognized you even in your clerical garb this afternoon, and I was sure that you would return. I also knew you when I spoke to you in front of the elevator shaft, and—I believe that I also warned you that you were walking into a trap."

"Not in exactly those words."

"No? Well, I did not suppose that you were so slow to catch ideas."

"There doesn't seem to be much of a trap here at present," said Nick, ignoring her sneer.

"That is because I have not sprung it yet."

"Ah! May I ask when you intend to do so?"

She did not reply, but turned to Miriam, and in a tone of unmistakable command, said:

"Miriam, go to your room, take off your clothes and go to bed; then sleep."

With a quick bound Nick placed himself beside Miriam and rested his hand upon her shoulder, holding her in her chair in spite of her efforts to rise.

"Be quiet, Miriam," he commanded. Then, to Irma: "So; you have mesmerized this child almost into a state of catalepsy, have you? Let me warn you that neither she nor you shall leave this room without my permission, and if there are others outside who contemplate entering it, let me warn them also, for I shall shoot, without question and without mercy, the first man or woman who appears."

For reply, Irma Plavatski threw back her head and laughed immoderately.

CHAPTER IX.

TAKING DESPERATE CHANCES.

"Sit down, Mr. Carter; do," she said, when her laughter ceased. "You are altogether too melodramatic in that attitude, and—hasn't the walk tired you? Really, now, did you suppose that Irma Plavatski was so reckless as to permit a man, who was unknown to her to conduct her more than a mile through the streets of New York at the dead of night? You pay a poor compliment to my womanhood, sir." And again she laughed.

"It seems to amuse you, at all events," said Nick, still standing beside Miriam's chair and resisting her faint struggles to rise.

"See!" he added, and he threw down his disengaged arm, so that his hand was extended toward her, and she could see that it held one of his never-failing weapons which was pointed directly at her.

But she did not flinch. Instead, that quizzical smile came into her eyes again, and she shrugged her shoulders as only a Russian woman can do it.

"More dramatics," she said, disdainfully. "Really, Mr. Carter, I think you mistook your calling. I could mention two in which I think you would have succeeded better than in the one you chose."

"Doubtless," said Nick.

"You would have made an unprecedented success as a play actor, and—also as a—er—what is your slang term for it?—ah, yes—as a masher, I think you call it; one who persecutes unescorted women with unwelcome attentions. Isn't that what you did to-night, Mr. Carter? I didn't ask your company; you forced yourself upon us; and you were quite successful, weren't you? Wonderfully so, in fact."

"Might I suggest that the part you played in that little game did not seem unfamiliar to you?" drawled Nick.

"Oh, you may suggest anything you please. Isn't your hand getting tired holding that pistol so steadily?"

"Not at all, thank you. I like to hold it."

"Are you going to keep that pose all night?"

"Until it pleases me to change it."

"One would suppose that you are afraid of me."

"No. I have simply changed my plan."

"Indeed. In what way?"

"I said a moment ago that I would shoot the first person who entered this room."

"I think you did say something of the kind; yes."

"Well, instead of doing that, I have decided that when another person enters the room I will shoot you first."

"Really? How unkind. I did not know that you could lie so glibly. You know very well that nothing on earth could force you to shoot a defenseless woman. I am no more afraid of your threats than I am of your—er—pistol, Mr. Carter; so pray put them both aside."

"Look," he said, in reply.

He opened his hand and the revolver disappeared up his sleeve. Then he threw his hand forward again, and it appeared in his grasp once more, as if by magic; and again he released it.

"Most interesting," said Irma, scornfully. "One

would think that you are a mountebank and a prestidigitator, as well as other things, wouldn't one?"

"Now," said Nick, "let us have done with pretense. I do not for an instant suppose you to be alone in this house, but all the same I am going out of it, and I am going to take Miriam Gray with me. Whoever attempts to stop me will get hurt."

He dropped one hand into his pocket, and with one motion brought out a small vial and his handkerchief. In an instant he had drawn the cork from the vial with his teeth, turned it upside down and spilled the contents on the handkerchief. Then, almost with the same motion, and so quickly that a second did not elapse until the act was accomplished, he pressed the chloroformed handkerchief over Miriam's nostrils and mouth, so that she instantly ceased her struggles and sank back in the chair, unconscious.

Then, with a bound like a panther, he leaped across the space between himself and Irma, and before she could move to protect herself, seized her, and despite her struggles, pressed the selfsame handkerchief against her face.

It was all done so silently and so quickly that she could not cry out an alarm, and not a sound of her struggles reached beyond the curtains, and he laid her back in her chair, helpless and still.

Then, in order to deceive any person who might be listening, he went on talking, calmly, and as if nothing had occurred, while he worked; and the work he elected to do was quickly accomplished.

It consisted simply in divesting Irma Plavatski of the warm jacket she wore, and wrapping it quickly around the still form of Miriam, and while he did it, he said:

"Really, mademoiselle, you are about the bravest woman I ever encountered. You dare to bring me here to this house where you have created another nest of your iniquities, and you dare to defy me when you have me here. You do not hesitate to show me an evidence of your nefarious work upon this poor child whose father was murdered by that hound, Dazaar, and you dare to sit there and laugh at me. Truly you are a remarkable woman."

The work was accomplished when he had completed that statement, and he raised Miriam tenderly in his arms, throwing her over his shoulder so that in a measure he could preserve the use of both his hands, and in the left one—the side upon which he held Miriam—he held not the revolver he carried up his sleeve, but a larger one that he had taken from one of his pockets.

Then, with the mate to it in his right hand, so that he actually had two weapons in reserve, he started for the door.

The house, it will be remembered, was brilliantly lighted, and that fact he now understood to be a part of the trap that had been prepared for him; but it was destined to work quite as splendidly for his benefit.

When he started toward the door with Miriam upon his shoulder—and to Nick Carter's great strength her weight was scarcely an impediment to his movements—it was not the door by which he had entered the room, for he came into it, as we know, through the main parlor and so past the curtains; but there was another door which communicated directly with the hall, and which, when ajar, would afford him a clear view of the outer door which he desired to reach.

It was, of course, his first thought and desire to save Miriam. Irma could wait. He would let the capture of that woman wait upon a more practical opportunity, for manifestly he could not hope to carry both of them out of the house.

Reaching the door, he threw it wide open, and then stepped back quickly, fully prepared for any onslaught that might happen; and he found himself face to face with two of the tall, black figures of Dazaar's Thibetans, and each of them was holding a rifle in his hands, aimed directly at the detective's heart—or at the senseless body of Miriam, for her form almost covered him.

At the same instant he heard a sound behind him, as if others had leaped into the room from behind the curtains, and he realized that there was not an instant to lose.

Nor did he hesitate.

With lightning-like quickness he fired twice.

Both of the men who stood in his way went down

like tenpins, and he leaped over their prostrate bodies toward the outer door.

Two more of the gigantic Thibetans sprang into the hallway from the parlor door, just as he reached it, and when he was too close to them to shoot, and evidently much closer to them than they had anticipated, for they were not prepared for his attack.

The first one he struck full in the middle of the forehead with the butt of one of his weapons, and the second collapsed upon the floor from a terrible kick which Nick administered in his abdomen.

The way was then, for an instant clear, to the front door, and he seized the knob and turned it.

The door opened instantly and easily, and the detective thrust himself through the opening into the vestibule and clanged the door shut behind him. In another second he was outside upon the steps; in two he had reached the sidewalk and was sounding his whistle for aid; and at the same instant, as if fate—instead of Ten-Ichi, which was the fact—had decreed it so, a patrol wagon dashed around the corner toward him; for Ten-Ichi, it will be remembered, was assigned to follow Irma Plavtski that night, and he had done so. He had also recognized Nick, and therefore suspected that the detective had been lured or had walked open-eyed into a trap, so he had lost very little time in procuring aid at the nearest police station.

But of all this, Nick was not yet aware. He only knew that a patrol wagon was coming toward him down the street, and that the occupants had heard his whistle.

In fact, that not a shot had been fired at him by the Thibetans was also present in his mind, but he attributed the withholding of their fire to the presence of Miriam on his shoulder, and in that he was correct. It was no part of the plans of Dazaar that she should be shot down.

It was strange, Nick thought, that the men who had attacked him made no effort to follow him outside the house, but they did not.

From the instant he stepped out upon the porch, not a sound from the inside came to his ears; and also, from that instant until the patrol wagon arrived in front of the residence, not more than half a dozen seconds could have elapsed.

Ten-Ichi and four uniformed policemen sprang down from the wagon, and he met them at the curbing. To one of the latter he gave the form of Miriam.

"Carry her to the drug store on the corner and revive her," he commanded. "She has been chloroformed. Call a Roosevelt Hospital ambulance and send her there. It is the nearest one to us. Tell the surgeon that she was hypnotized before she was chloroformed. When you have done that come back here."

Then, to Ten-Ichi:

"All right, lad, I understand. You have done well. You got here in the nick of time, which seems to be your habit."

Then, to the remaining policemen:

"Get your ax and bar from the box under the seat. Don't stop to ask questions or to ring bells. Break down the door, for there is somebody in that house who must not escape."

CHAPTER X.

THE DEFIANCE OF DAZAAR.

From the moment of the arrival of the patrol wagon upon the scene, certainly not more than ten minutes could have elapsed before the door was battered down and Nick Carter, followed by Ten-Ichi and the bluecoats, entered the house.

And yet, when they did enter it, they were greeted by silence that was absolute.

Nothing that the eye could discover that had been observable when the detective crossed the threshold with Irma Plavatski was changed. The lights were still burning brightly and the interior of the house remained undisturbed.

Nick was confident that he had laid out four of the Thibetans, so that they could not have escaped without aid in that short time, but not a sign of them was to be seen. Two of them he had shot down. It is true that he did not shoot to kill; only to stun, for his marksmanship was so unerring that he could easily do that trick, even under the most trying circumstances, and while he had not been particular to avoid hurting

them severely, he had nevertheless intended only to graze their heads sufficiently to make a wound, perhaps, and to render them unconscious; the other two he had knocked out quite as completely and in all reason they should still have been lying out upon the floor of the hallway.

But they were not. They had disappeared.

Nick rushed into the back parlor only to find that it was also deserted.

Irma, who had been chloroformed and senseless, had also found a way to escape.

"By the great Lama of Thibet, Ten-Ichi!" he exclaimed, "anybody might think that I had been fighting wind, for all the evidence of the presence of those men they have left behind them. Come, we will search the place from top to bottom."

And search it they did, but with only two results.

In the back room of the second floor they discovered the Earl of Croydon. He was stretched upon a bed, fully clothed, and was snoring stentoriously, as if he had been stupified by some drug, as indeed proved to be the case; but the earl was the only living person or evidence of one they could discover.

The second and final result of their search revealed the fact that the scuttle that communicated with the roof was not fastened, and it therefore told quite plainly how the inmates of the house had made their escape.

But they had made it so swiftly and so deftly that they had left not one vestige of a trace behind them. That they had crossed the roofs to another house into which it had been prearranged that they might enter, was without doubt, but into which of the many they had escaped was utterly impossible to determine.

The escaping men had left no trail behind them. It was evident that they had bound up the wounds of their senseless companions so that no drop of blood could betray them, and it was equally certain that there must have been many more persons in the house than the detective had encountered, for in their escape they had carried five unconscious persons with them, four of whom were unusually heavy men. Why they had left the earl behind them could not be determined unless he was one too many for them to carry, or they had forgotten him in their haste, which was likely the case.

"There is only one thing to do now," said Nick, when they had completed the search, and the most careful investigation of the roofs of adjoining houses had utterly failed to reveal a sign of the route of their flight. He turned to one of the policemen and added:

"I want you to return to your station house and ask your captain to do me the favor to detail a dozen good men to surround this entire block. Let no person, no matter whom, pass them without giving a full account of himself and his story being proved. In the morning, as soon as the residents in the neighborhood have had their breakfast, we will make a house-to-house search. Hurry, now, my man; there is no time to lose. If your captain wants additional authority, let him telephone to headquarters and say that I asked it; that will be sufficient. Leave two of your men here in charge of this house. Ten-Ichi, you call a cab—there is a 'phone—and we will take the earl back to his hotel."

* * * * * * *

"Well, sir, you are coming around, I see. How do you feel?"

The hotel doctor had just left the room and Nick Carter and Ten-Ichi were seated beside the earl, where he rested upon a couch in his own apartments in the Aberdonian.

"Rather weak, I think," said the earl, smiling faintly. "What has happened? Have I been ill? And who are you? A doctor?"

"I am the Rev. James Augustus Stanton in another dress," replied Nick. "In other words, I am Nick Carter."

"Really?" The earl smiled again, faintly. "You

have so many guises—or shall I call them disguises?—that you puzzle me. But how does it happen that you are here again?"

"Where were you," asked Nick, "when your memory last served you? What is your last recollection of incidents?"

"Why, I complained of a headache, and the princess offered to stroke it for me. She is very beautiful, and I did not object. I must have fallen asleep."

"Ay, sir, and walked in your sleep as well. That was before ten o'clock in the evening; it is now almost three in the morning."

"Indeed! Where is the countess?"

"We do not know, only that she is not here."

"Not here? Where, then, has she gone?"

"I do not know—now; but I will know, later. One of my assistants is on her trail, and he is better than a bloodhound."

The earl sat up and rubbed his eyes confusedly, still half dazed.

"What has happened, sir? Won't you tell me?"

"If you think you are strong enough to bear it. Your enemy, Dazaar, has been at work again, and the woman whom you call the princess is one of his accomplices. She has doubtless lured your wife away."

"My God! Is it so bad as that?"

"Only pray, sir, that it may not be worse."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I made use of the phrase 'lured your wife away,' advisedly, for I feared that that is what has happened. But rest assured that wherever she is we will find her again."

"The Devil Worshipers!" gasped the earl.

"Ay, sir, the Devil Worshipers."

"But their meeting! She will be there."

"So will I. And so will Ten-Ichi, here."

"God help me," groaned the earl.

"He will help you, sir, and with His help, so will I."

"Thank you, Mr. Carter. I will try to be brave."

"That's right. Dazaar is almost at the end of his rope now. I ask only a little time more to draw a net around him that he cannot break through. And now, sir, with your permission, I am going to take you home with me, where I can watch over you. You will be much safer in my house."

"As you will, Mr. Carter. I place myself unreservedly in your hands."

* * * * * * *

It was dawn when the detective seated himself in his favorite chair in his own room, for he was determined to take no sleep as yet. Moreover, upon entering the vestibule of his home when he returned accompanied by Ten-Ichi and the earl, he had found the following note where it had been thrust beneath the door:

"As a matter of fact, my dear Carter," it said, "you are the most delightful opponent I have ever met. I haven't time to write much now, only to say that your escape to-night was superb. You beat me that time, but I will beat you the next time. By the way, I have two interesting things to tell you. One is that you may as well withdraw the officers who are watching the block where you were to-night, for there is nothing there for them to watch, as this letter proves. The other is that I have the honor to inform you that your helper, Patsy, is again in my power, and that before the week is out I shall again offer him the embraces of the maiden of steel. Need I sign my name, or do you guess that it is DAZAAR."

THE END.

The next issue of the Nick Carter Weekly, No. 37, and No. 5 of the New Series of Nick Carter's adventures, prepared and edited from his personal journal of amazing cases, by his chief assistant, Chickering Carter, will be entitled "The Cross of Daggers; or, In the Lair of the Devil Worshipers." In this story the reader will, for the first time, be introduced to the real Dazaar, who has hitherto remained unknown.

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